

1.05 Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey

Last Updated on 1/16/2016

Background: The **Mid-winter Waterfowl Survey (MWS)** is conducted annually in **early January** as part of the nation-wide wintering waterfowl monitoring effort led by U.S. Fish & Wildlife Division of Migratory Bird Management. In order to maximize productivity and volunteer effort, we conduct the Fish Spring NWR MWS in conjunction with the Audubon's Christmas Bird Count (CBC) that takes place around the same time.

MWS Point-of-Contact: Each state has an appointed MWS coordinator. This coordinator sometimes works with other state employees to ensure the MWS runs smoothly throughout the state. As of this time, our point-of-contact at UDWR is:

Blair Stringham

SLC, UDWR

blairstringham@utah.gov

Office: 801-538-4781

Mobile: 801-362-1480

Targeted Survey Timeframe: As mentioned in the background, we conduct this survey in conjunction with the CBC survey at Fish Springs NWR. **It is important to note** that at this time, protocol allows from the MWS to be conducted earlier than the national targeted time-frame while the CBC does not. As such the CBC and MWS at Fish Springs NWR are usually conducted during the last weekend of the CBC's survey timeframe. At this time, the CBC survey targeted timeframe is permanently locked into **December 14th –January 5th**.

Survey Forms: These are provided to us from the state and may change between years. Since we usually are a little early with our MWS survey, if you have not heard from B. Stringham by the week prior to the survey, you should contact him and request the survey forms for the current year. Be sure to review the forms each year to see what information (besides counts) they want recorded. **Make sure this data is recorded during the survey effort.**

Methods: The waterfowl counts for all management units **except** the South Springs Complex (SSC) are conducted as part of the CBC and are usually completed just before or shortly after lunch. **No one** should drive or walk **any** of the SSC roads prior to the afternoon joint count effort. This needs to be communicated and stressed to all participants. Once the morning CBC count efforts are completed, all participants should reconvene at a set time and place. At this time, everyone will be assigned a survey station. Which survey stations are manned and how many per each is determined by the number of participating observers. It is ideal to have at least one person stationed near each spring. At minimum, one group should be stations up near the gravel pile in the southern portion of the SSC and one group on the rise on the housing-side of Middle Spring. **One person/truck** will be assigned to drive the SSC roads and flush the waterfowl once everyone has made it to their stations.

Observers: **It is very important that they try not to disturb the birds when moving to their survey station.** No vehicle should drive any SSC road except for the road closest to the housing area that doesn't go near water. Observers may have to park and walk to their site. Make sure they know not to block the roads when they park as the person assigned to 'flush' the birds will be driving on all the roads. Each observer will record on a sheet of paper how many of each species they count as each group of waterfowl near their area is flushed. Observers should pay very close attention to trying to identify species only seen as individuals or small groups in addition to completing the larger counts for common species.

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Driver: **Do not drive any of the roads until all observers are at their stations.** Wait at least 5-minutes after everyone reports they are at their station before you drive so that any waterfowl that were accidentally flushed by the observers will have settled. At this time you will systematically drive all of the roads in the SSC honking the horn to flush birds that may be flush by the trucks presences alone. **Drive at a slow pace** to give observers to count each group as it flushes. **Although you are driving you should be trying to compile a SSC grand total for each of the most commonly seen species** – leave identifying the species only seen as individuals or small groups to the official observers.

Once the entire SSC area has been driven and flushed, all observers and the driver return to a designated meeting area to compile their numbers into a final count.

Final Count: The **final count is a combination** of all of the waterfowl counted in the other management units during the morning CBC combined with the final total from the SSC area. This **final SSC total** is determined as a group based upon what is observed. With input from the observers, the driver usually determines the final count for the most commonly seen species. Once the SSC final count for each species is completed, it is combined with the CBC counts from other management units to determine the **grand total count per species**. These are the values used to fill in the official MWS form.

Once the official forms are filled out, the electronic copy should be saved to the server, a hard copy should be printed out on placed in a MWS folder/binder and an **electronic version should be sent to B. Stringham** at the email address listed above.